

# Blog Entries

Here I offer a series of blog entries. I wrote these in October and November of 2017, publishing them on my public blog site. My purpose was to explore living with paranoid schizophrenia. I wrote about my own struggles, and also the many confusions, challenges, paradoxes and mysteries present in today's world. I would like to think that these topics affect us one and all, crazy or sane.

## A Schizophrenic Perspective

### Views Of A (Fairly) Lucid Mental Health Consumer

#### Introduction

It started with the following Facebook post. I decided to admit to the world at large that I suffer from paranoid schizophrenia. Here is what I told my friends, family and acquaintances:

“Hi folks. I think it’s time I share something with you all. This is in the wake of a number of my fellow friends and musicians being honest about their lives and struggles.”

“I am living and having been coping for years with a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia.”

“As a child and teen, I was deemed healthy and was a very successful student, among other things, graduating near the very top of my high school class, receiving the highest ACT score in the state and attending a prestigious university.”

“Something began to go wrong during my college years— possibly triggered by the use of marijuana and LSD. Or, it may have just been a part of my genes, triggered by my age.”

“In 1995, I received the diagnosis.”

“My early years with schizophrenia were quite difficult. I lost nearly everything I had. I felt that my life would never be normal again. My status dropped in every way. My family provided me shelter for some years, but there were also many years when I lived alone, with little money, on a government check and food stamps. I was quite isolated, shunning social interaction, spending most of my waking hours engaged in my own particular forms of creativity (notably my main and eventually very successful musical act, ‘Mystified’). I got a lot of joy and fulfillment from writing music, even though times were hard in other ways.”

“Through my years of isolation, I kept my diagnosis private. When I met the woman who would later become my wife, I shared my condition with her. I did this at an early point in our relationship. She was accepting and supportive from the very beginning. I am grateful to have found someone special like her.”

“Typically, paranoid schizophrenia is regarded as ‘degenerative’— i.e. it just gets worse with time. But with the proper medication, treatment and support, I have seen a slow but steady improvement. Now that I am 46, I am happy, happily married and steadily employed. My main and only major symptom, that of hearing voices, is kept in check with the love of others and a single pill I take every evening in small dosage.”

“I would like to clarify that, in spite of my condition, I have a high i.q. and am capable of clear logic and deductive thinking. I have strong spiritual beliefs, and they are not strange— rather they constitute Protestant Christianity. I am capable of giving and receiving love, and do so every day. Though I have a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia, I now realize that my illness does not define me.”

“To give some examples of famous schizophrenics, John Nash, Syd Barrett (of Pink Floyd), and Jack Kerouac all lived with the diagnosis and achieved great things.”

“I wanted you all to know this, as I feel that keeping such issues quiet is not fully honest. I also want folks to see that conditions like this can be dealt with, and people who struggle, though they have their struggles, really can live full, happy, creative lives full of joy and value.”

“I believe there are those who may have guessed (or already knew) of my diagnosis. This may only confirm what they had suspected. Others may be surprised.”

“This goes to you all, as I believe in love and in the truth, to my fellow courageous artists who suffer too and who have revealed the truth, and especially to my family and wonderful wife who have helped me get to this point.”

“And here is to continued growth and improvement, towards the best, healthiest and happiest life I can achieve, with God’s grace.”

“If anyone has any questions, I am open to engaging in dialogue about the subject. Feel free to ask.”

That was the post, from October of 2017. I would like to add that the reactions to that post were universally positive and understanding.

From here I would like to begin sharing some thoughts on my illness— first-hand experiences with schizophrenia, rendered as lucidly as possible.

## **Schizophrenia And Modernity**

I wanted to mention an interesting paradox created by mental illness. As a patient, I am told that my mind does not function properly. Since it is my mind, I have to accept this— that what I think is “not right”. Yet, I have to survive in this complex and ever-changing world. Any mind should probably doubt itself— but if it doubts itself profoundly, that makes survival difficult.

I have secretly had faith in my mind and my functionality all along. I have a high iq and and a great problem solver. I am glad I have this faith in myself, and hope that people in this world can find a way to avoid applying this paradox– suggesting that a person reject their own most basic thought processes.

Interestingly, this profound self-doubt is said to be part of the modern condition. An awareness of self, a rejection of several or many impulses (even essential or vital ones) is necessary for navigating this world. I realize that I am not alone– I am part of my age.

### **Isolation, Socialization**

Sadly, one of my first tendencies as a schizophrenic was to isolate. I moved into my own apartment in South Saint Louis, and spent about 99% of my time alone. Much of that time was devoted to creative pursuits. It doesn't take a genius to see, though, that, already being a bit eccentric, I slowly slid away from normalcy.

Steadying influences included my family, and my job. Even volunteering once a week was helpful. When I moved on to working part-time, my contact with the everyday world, though awkward and stressful at times, was very helpful.

A movement has happened where lots of mentally ill people are assembled together in a “day program” environment. I tried that out, for a period of time. But– who's to say that, just because people share the same or similar diagnoses, that they will get along well together? It may be that, at times, they might navigate one another further and further from what is called sanity.

On the other hand, a movement has happened where mentally ill people are treated as being almost completely independent. They live alone, shop for groceries, and so forth (as I generally did). How often is it, then, that the sufferer lapses into isolation, possibly watching endless hours of television, smoking pack after pack of cigarettes?

My most helpful contacts were with sane people. From them, I re-learned some of the language of real life. But, are sane people willing to walk side-by-side with the mentally ill? Would that frighten them? Offend them?

Some might suggest that it is already the case– that society is sick enough, and contains enough sick people, that the world is like one big outpatient clinic.

A friend shared with me that there are sociologists (such as Hartmut Rosa) who see essential flaws in modernity– that the pace of life has accelerated to the degree that most people are simply unable to cope. Stress is a huge problem in our society– with its mental, emotional and physical effects. Further, my wife and I often discuss how often it is nowadays that a friend or acquaintance admits to being depressed, maybe having a bi-polar condition. I would guess that a larger amount of the population takes anti-depressant medication than most people realize.

## **Roles**

As a schizophrenic with a full-time job, one thing I am beginning to see is that a lot depends on how I define myself. I provide technical support at my job, and to the extent that I can portray myself (accurately) as someone who can help, who has information to share that can benefit patrons, I can assume some degree of leadership.

If I were to continually admit to patrons and coworkers that I was mentally ill, or experiencing symptoms, I would find that to be counterproductive, and I might even lose my job. If I did, I would really miss it.

If I can see beyond the illness, and how it tries to define me, and believe that I can provide assistance to others— if I can in fact realize this aim— then I begin to assume again the mantle of health.

In essence, if I can experience what sane people do on a regular basis, take on challenges such as theirs, and try my best to adapt to them without shooting myself in the foot, I can begin to regain clarity and purpose.

I would suggest that this experience could be shared by many mentally ill people— including many who spend most of their time isolated or participating in various forms of leisure.

A program like Ticket To Work (which I was a part of) allows patients to take on employment without immediately losing their benefits. Benefits are gradually tapered off, as the patient begins to participate more actively in the world of work.

I can't emphasize how much this program helped me, and how important it is for functioning mentally ill people to find a productive and somewhat social means to occupy their time.

It is important for schizophrenics to appear “above ground”— in the real world, as producers, not just as consumers.

## **The Music Scene**

During my more isolated years, I decided to try to become a musician. That had always been a dream of mine, even before my diagnosis. I found myself with plenty of time every day to create and share music, and was fortunate enough to have a computer and an internet connection.

I networked with literally thousands of people, most of them being fellow musicians. At first I did not know, but in time began to realize, that many, many of these people were also mentally ill, or somehow marginalized. Most of the musicians participating in the online music scene, including the netlabel scene, which I was so much a part of, were eccentric in some way, or had

characteristics people would define as off-center. They were sexually “different”, living in poverty, and/or coping with addiction or health issues.

The internet music scene evolved into a large-scale phenomenon where connections were made and new and unusual expressions were shared. This seemed both exciting and at times disturbing.

The music scene definitely demonstrated that, thanks to the internet, all kinds of subjective experiences were being created and passed back and forth, often for free, and more than ever before.

One did not have to be a unique talent or millionaire to become a musician. It just took a computer and a few free programs. And so the gates were opened for all kinds of people (like myself) to participate.

## **Purpose**

I was thinking of various purposes for this blog. I don’t want to just talk about myself endlessly as a gesture of self-reference or vanity. Helping to de-stigmatize schizophrenia would be a worthy goal. I think, further, I’d like to suggest and convey that mentally ill people can be highly functioning people.

When receiving a diagnosis, it is often true that a person “drops out” of our society. They stop working, lose relationships, and fall off of the grid. The government sends them a check every month. They deposit it, and get by in a new and reduced way.

This saddens and frustrates me. I am highly able, though schizophrenic, and I know many others who are, as well. Functioning schizophrenics might not make the best bus drivers, pilots or surgeons. But there are many, many other possible roles we could play in society, and some might involve a degree of expertise or leadership.

I think that needs to be said, and hopefully believed. That mental illness does not have to mean that a patient’s life is completely or permanently compromised. There is much more that can be done, more potential.

This is not all on the health care professionals, to witness to this issue. Many already believe it. It is for society at large, yes– and perhaps more importantly for the patient himself or herself. When the world says for them to take a bow, have a seat and become consumers forever, I would ask more able patients to resist the urge to accept this. To believe in themselves, that they can do great things. To make a genuine effort to do so.

## **Disjointed**

Somewhat on a tangent, I would like to remark on the disjointed nature of modernity at large. Certain works of art, such as the film “Brazil” (Terry Gilliam, 1985), express this well– the sense (and reality) that things can change quickly, and that sudden and unexpected shifts often happen.

It is an experience of different worlds. There is the world of the city, of the suburb, of the country. Work has its own world, and home represents one, too. The presence of others changes how this feels, and this all can become very complex.

The city itself, actually, is a good metaphor– how, moving from one block to the next, we can see extreme differences in poverty level, crime, infrastructure, and so forth.

Modern life can be disjointed, like the lines of the figure in “Nude Descending A Staircase” (Marcel Duchamp, 1912).

How does this reference schizophrenia? I would suggest that modernity propels many closer to mental illness than they would prefer. It can be a crazy world– just read the news. Further, I would attest that schizophrenia can make it harder to transition smoothly between these various worlds– it is that shock of travelling from home to work, or from one city to another, and so forth, that is so problematic.

In fact, with cell phones, the internet and other technologies, modern people can find themselves moving from world to another many times in a minute– often, doing so all day every day. The schizophrenic may find this to be especially challenging.

## **Symptoms**

I wanted to write a short post about 3 symptoms of schizophrenia. It is interesting, because they sound oddly like coping skills.

“A Change In Sense Of Self”– the patient adopts a new and different view of him or herself, at the onset of the illness. True– and true, too, that we all tend to regard ourselves differently in different situations. In this life, we may define ourselves, as, say, a husband at home, and a technician at work. Further, to the degree that we allow others’ opinions of ourselves to dictate our identities, we might adopt all kinds of fragmented or inconsistent views of ourselves. Nowadays, our sense of self changes, it can be quite fluid, whether healthy or not.

“Racing Thoughts”– the patient expresses that his or her thought patterns move more quickly than they should, and perhaps sporadically. That being considered, life in this consumerist, technologically advanced reality can very easily bring on and even to some degree necessitate thoughts that “race”. I would even suggest that many people have racing thoughts– but that schizophrenics may find them harder to deal with.

“Flattening Of Affect”– the patient responds to stimuli in flattened and / or soft monotones. This symptom reminds me of trying to deal with crises in public, or any kind of escalating situation. Even healthy people have to step back, take a deep breath– and address things in level, calm ways.

Taken one way, these are symptoms of mental illness. In other ways, they are attributes of most peoples’ psyches in this changeable modern life.

### **Drone Music And Schizophrenia**

Drone music is a genre that is an interest of mine. As the musical act, “mystified”, I composed literally thousands of pieces of drone music. The smooth, steady tones of this kind of music emerged with a purpose to bring on a state of calm– to soothe listeners, and perhaps even to induce trance states.

Pushed beyond a certain point, and drone can also resemble the “Flattening Of Affect” symptom– simulating cold, emotionless modes, even ushering them in.

Where to draw the line between a healthy sense of peace and an unhealthy lack of emotion?

### **Philip K. Dick**

Philip K. Dick is a writer who is getting a lot of press lately. Among other things, he was a paranoid schizophrenic. There is a lot you could say about him, especially concerning certain ideas he put forward in his writings.

One major idea was that of subjectivity. PKD suggests that each person has their own point of view– which is legitimized by their unique experience(s). For example, in *Maze Of Death* (1970 Doubleday), he demonstrates that, in a small group of people, each person lives in their own reality, dictated by particular rules and traits.

A result of my own schizophrenia is that I am aware of this view, and often tempted to adopt it. The purer the subjectivity I accept, the more I can put forward my own perspective. Though it is said that I have a mental illness, a subjective view rather suggests that my reality is still my own and is therefore genuine, as much as anyone else’s.

What is the problem? There is such a thing as a social fabric. I can say that, for example, I am having an aural hallucination, or “hearing a voice”. If no one else can hear it, it would likely be dismissed as not being “real”. This preserves the social order. And, I am one to admit, as I work with the public, that listening to people talk to themselves, especially in any volume, can be quite disturbing. It’s all real to them, sure, but what about everyone else, and the things they have to do?

You might say that reality is democratic. If most people accept it, then it is seen as the case. I can claim subjectivity, but my view might be eclipsed by the majority, dismissed as being incorrect.

Some people I dialogue with suggest that we are moving towards an era where subjectivity will be the ultimate guideline. I am not so sure. If we are, I wonder if we can also keep peace and order.

The issue of subjectivity never really resolves for me, but can only be reduced to a dialectic, shifting between poles of value.

That being said, I think I can understand why PKD would think of things in a subjective way, and I do appreciate his many contributions to the world of thought, which are seemingly so relevant today— including his idea that the world itself, or environment, is like a character, and is subject to changing traits and qualities.

### **Time, Perspective, Madness**

I once borrowed a friend's copy of Habermas' The Philosophical Discourse Of Modernity (1985)— a book of contemporary philosophy. I was a literature major, not philosophy, and I really struggled with the book. But there were a few ideas that resonated with me.

One was that of a modern reality of time. Habermas puts forward the notion of "Jetztzeit". The idea is that time moves in a particular manner, as experienced by people, in this modern world. We generally encounter a kind of "low" or "empty" time- filled with everyday commerce, interactions and events. On occasion, we come to experience a "sacred" or "holy" time— our profane lives are punctuated by these kinds of Messianic interventions.

A theory of mental illness might be, what if this experience with time is misinterpreted? What if a patient either applies the Messianic time to nearly all events, or refuses to apply it to any? That would result in the development of false ideas.

If you are sane, experiencing most of your life as this low time, and a mentally ill person tries to impress on you that every moment is extremely important, ardently sacred, that would seem strange to you, inaccurate, unreal— unhealthy.

A person who never has encounters with the sacred misunderstands peak events when they occur— again seeming unhealthy, missing important aspects of a whole existence.

Would it be possible for schizophrenics to learn of and accept Habermas' model? I am sure it was his view that "Jetztzeit" was reality, not just an opinion. It described our current modern mode. Therefore it would be helpful to be aware of this experience of time, and to try to share it with one another, and to accept it.



## **Has The World Gone Crazy?**

Looking around at the world today, events in the news, and so forth, a person might wonder, “Has the world gone crazy?”

Well, from my point of view, I would say there is good and bad. On a positive note, the world will never consider itself insane— the majority of people will always accept their own perspective(s) as being real and legitimate. I believe that mental illness will continue to be perceived as a peripheral phenomenon— that schizophrenics, for example, will be seen as sick or maladjusted, at least to some degree. Reality is somewhat democratic. It will be defined by what most people suggest, and therefore what most suggest will be construed as being healthy.

On the other hand, the bad— modernity, with its accelerating pace, frightening feedback loops and other phenomena, may indeed be stressful and challenging enough that it is causing “normal” people to increasingly have symptoms of mental illness. At this point, it seems that there are more people in therapy than out, and it is suggested that anti-depressants and related medications are so prevalent that they have started to pollute our drinking water. Stress is a killer, and few are exempt from it— those who are seem not to grasp things.

So, paradoxically, the world is not going crazy. But it seems like a lot of the people in it are beginning to act crazy themselves.

## **“Fake News”**

Not long ago, my wife and I were watching a local news broadcast. It covered a meeting that was held locally, which my wife attended in person, concerning a topic many find to be relevant. When she watched the news coverage, she was angered that it did not reflect her experience with the meeting— only certain people were interviewed, and the report was very much presented from a particular and abbreviated point of view.

The news media communicates with what seems to be an “objective” voice. If a report or story is not called an “editorial”, then it is to be taken as truth.

Yet, increasingly, I wonder, what is truth? What is objective? Can we know and trust what we hear?

The schizophrenic is asked to throw doubt towards their impressions and hallucinations, in order to deduce what is healthy and true. Sadly, I feel that we find ourselves in a state as an entire society that we must do the same.

Paranoid, perhaps, of me, but I suspect that the main movements and tidings on a global scale have been largely shrouded in secrecy for decades. Few people know the “actual” truth— I feel

that we are not meant to know, not trusted to, as citizens— sane or mentally ill. I write this, not really being into conspiracy theories, as I find most of them to be false.

The question remains— who makes a claim to an objective voice? Many have tried, many have made that claim. How many have achieved this with due sincerity?

### **“Blade Runner 2049”**

My wife and I went to see this year’s big reboot, “Blade Runner 2049” (2017), last night. There is a new director (Denis Villeneuve), a new musician doing the score, yet many of the same original actors and actresses. The setting, main premise and other elements were created by Philip K. Dick, the writer mentioned in an earlier post who suffered from paranoid schizophrenia.

An interesting resonance, not to give too much away, was the lead character’s (“Joe’s”) confusion over his identity. Though it was suggested from the beginning that he was a “replicant”, (a genetically engineered android), certain developments complicate this description, and this becomes a profound issue for the character.

This resembles a problem that schizophrenics often deal with. Terrible to say, but when a person has a debilitating mental illness, it can be quite a blow to self-esteem. The patient may wonder if he is like others— up to par— even fully human. There are those who, publicly or privately, might judge or treat disabled people like they are less than normal, less than human.

This is complicated. Not only is it painful for the patient (who may more than anything want to be construed as able and normative), it is complicated for those who judge. If they know there is a mental health issue, this becomes a trait that is hard not to consider. In fact, though schizophrenic myself, I have found it is nearly impossible not to be at least somewhat critical or distrusting of other schizophrenics, due to their conditions(s).

One of the more powerful scenes in “Blade Runner 2049” is when Joe discovers that a memory of his, which he considered to be fake, “implanted”, seems to have actually happened. The idea that he might be born of man and woman, “human”, causes a dramatic emotional reaction, and leads him to question how he views himself, and how he is treated by others.

I would suggest that, in many ways, schizophrenia can be more of a difference than simply a weakness, and can assure you that I feel as fully human now as I did when I was considered healthy. I am probably better at some things now that I have this diagnosis, and certainly still have feelings, a spiritual life, relationships, and the various components that make a person whole.

I used to see a psychologist, and I asked him what makes a person healthy. Wholeness was his answer— that a person has a complete and nuanced life. A whole person is physical, emotional,

and spiritual. I can confirm that a whole life can be achieved by a person who has a mental illness.

Can others view a schizophrenic person as being wholly human? Can the patient him or herself adapt this view, as well?

## **Perfection**

In today's fast-paced world, there is at times a sense that people should seem "perfect"—they should be virtually omniscient. They should look great, at all times. Never stutter. Never show weakness.

These are impossibly high standards. A mentally ill person must certainly come to terms with imperfection. Keeping this flaw secret for years was very stressful for me— and this became more and more awkward until I felt I was positively insincere.

Meditating on Christianity, it is believed that Christ was perfect, and without sin. That being said, we mortals are imperfect, and can never be without flaw.

Of course, to complicate, we try to achieve perfection. It is in our nature to do so. But we are always reminded that only Christ was perfect, and that His life and suffering are meant to free us from this tendency (and from sin in general).

Perhaps one key to actual ability would be for us all, schizophrenic or no, to admit to our imperfections, to realize them, and then to work from there, with the assumption that, of course, we all try to help.

As my mother shared with me years ago, "We are all wounded healers".

## **Serotonin**

The pill I take, the only one for my schizophrenia, is Risperdol. I have taken it for many years. Lately, I have been gradually reducing my dosage, which is small anyway.

What does Risperdol do? It is a Serotonin inhibitor. It reduces the flow of Serotonin in my brain. Some may know that Serotonin has a lot to do with a person's experience with pleasure.

It seems that, for whatever reason, the way I experience pleasure has a negative effect on my mental health, generally, and my concentration specifically. When I go off of the medication (which I have tried, but don't recommend), I slip into a state of unfocused confusion.

I wonder if I am the only one, if schizophrenics are the only people, to notice that unhealthy relationships with pleasure, pleasure-seeking and the way the mind experiences these things, have a negative effect on one's emotional and/or mental life?

### **Patient Power**

A schizophrenic patient assumes, of course, a subservient or somehow complicit role with their psychiatrist, and with other medical professionals. This is important, it is necessary. It has helped me to seek treatment, and to remain on my prescribed medication.

There have been other benefits of treatment, as well as case-management. My psychiatrist helped to convince me to quit smoking. I am very grateful to her for that, and glad that I did. Several of my case managers suggested that I seek employment, which I did— and years later, I am happily and gainfully working.

Just the same, as a patient, I feel I need to meet the doctors and caseworkers halfway. At least halfway. I have to put forth an effort, too. It is wrong to expect others to spoon feed me everything I need in life and all I need to know.

Although I am schizophrenic, I still need to work hard, pay my bills and taxes, and live up to my various obligations. I recognize that there may be patients so incapacitated that they are unable to do these things, but I would recommend that mid- to high- functioning mentally ill people try to push their boundaries to see if they can handle more responsibility.

I would suggest that many people are capable of more than they realize.

It's ok to hope for a miracle, but it takes effort, experience, and understanding to make things happen in the "real" world. Mentally ill people need to be more— gulp— self-reliant.

### **Schizophrenia And Intimacy**

One of the main casualties of mental illness can be intimacy.

When I was first diagnosed, I remember thinking, "Ok. That's it for me and women."

The situation resulted in a complex. On the one hand, I felt unworthy of intimacy, like I was "damaged goods". On the other hand, I felt increasingly afraid of being touched.

I took it as a challenge to my self-control. How little touch can I get by with? Can I keep people at arm's length? Can I understand and control my own impulses, especially that of desire?

For many years, I lived in solitude, with little human contact. I did not even have a pet.

Slowly, something began to change. I started to listen to my body, to pay attention to my pain. I realized that I needed companionship, recognized that in some ways my life had become flat and two-dimensional.

I was at a friend's birthday party, and I was struck by an intuition. I felt that I was going to meet someone special there. I introduced myself to several women— each admitted sooner or later that they either were uninterested, or already had a companion.

One woman allowed me to give her my e-mail address. She later became my wife.

To be honest, 5 years later and intimacy is still a complicated issue for me. But I am relieved that I have someone to be with, and glad that I finally began to realize that I can't manhandle nature. I can't force my needs for human touch away.

Nature is not ever fooled this way— not for long, anyway.

## **Dystopia**

I am going to share what I call a "schizophrenic's rejoinder".

It is true that this is a world with many so called "able" people. True, as well, that with mental acuity, persistence, technology and other attributes, they can achieve great things.

True, also, sadly, that we can initiate all kinds of mastery games, including some that threaten the very existence of the planet, such as military escalation between rival nations, pollution, and global warming.

The strong survive and thrive, while our planet slowly teeters towards ruin.

I think this is one key to Philip K. Dick's (and other writers' and artists') creation of and rendering of dystopias— worlds where things are just not the way they should be.

Being mentally ill can be humbling, but it also allows a person to step outside the mainstream for a fuller view of the kinds of things humanity does— both impressive and not so impressive.

## **What Crazy Isn't**

Schizophrenia is a complicated syndrome of illnesses and symptoms that is hard to understand. Medical professionals themselves are still trying to figure out what it is, what causes it and how to treat it.

My main symptom is hearing voices. In the back of my mind, especially when I am alone, there is often a chattering of voices— those of people I know. These voices are not threatening, and are generally easy to ignore when I am in the company of others.

For me, crazy means the voices. It does not mean a lack of cognitive function. I am quite capable of deductive reasoning, problem solving and various other types of thought. Not only am I capable of them, but I apply them often— sometimes helping to resolve issues that sane people have.

The point is that schizophrenia, and other mental illnesses, don't necessarily mean that a person can't be reasonable, responsible or constructive. Sane people should be aware that mentally ill people can often be quite helpful and even genuinely inspired. Patients should realize that they themselves can still contribute to society, perhaps even mentally or intellectually, and not to let their "disability" hamper their own efforts to understand the world and their lives, make sense of things, and help.

After all, today's world needs all the help it can get.

## **Hallucinations**

I must confess, I spend most of my waking hours in front of a screen.

I am not one to binge watch cable or immerse myself in movies. But I do spend much of my time online, and/or creating music, video or other media.

Having created so much of my own material, it's hard for me to play the role of media consumer. I often feel that I am being steeped in other people's ideas when I watch shows— that I am being subtly programmed or offered false information.

It is interesting to me— when a schizophrenic hallucinates, that is involuntary. But most of us essentially are voluntarily "hallucinating" most of the time, when we imbibe programs and other media.

A few months ago I tried virtual reality— it was quite immersive, very trippy. Reality became even harder to differentiate from projection. In the future, I firmly believe that most of us will interact voluntarily with collective "hallucinations" (or virtual environments) constantly.

For better or worse, we will most of us agree to hallucinate together.

## **Symbols**

For most of my life, I wanted to be a painter. My wife encouraged me, a couple of years ago, to purchase an acrylic paint kit. I have been practicing my art since, and have developed some special techniques.

One is to use spray paint, together with acrylic paints. I don't intend to rip off the notions of graffiti artists, but I really do like the way graffiti looks, and particularly spray paint.

Another technique involves what I call "Dream Symbols".

Dream Symbols are shapes or symbols that seem to suggest something vaguely textual, but are indecipherable.

They are a good representation of my early experiences with schizophrenia. For several years, I found myself unable to easily decode many of society's taboos and signs. I tended to miss subtle references or innuendos, especially involving things like sexuality, race, money and power. I think, in a way, I was pushing this kind of input away, refusing to deal with it.

Perhaps this was partly because, as a schizophrenic, I did not accept myself and my place in this world. If I correctly interpreted society's "symbols", I would have to admit to my reduced and partially incapacitated situation.

So, my "Dream Symbols" paintings and prints depict my hazy and confused interpretations of the communications I was receiving from the world. By encrypting them, I protected myself from them.

### **Trying To Be A "Guru"**

I am still not sure what triggered my schizophrenia, back in my mid-20's. A good guess might be that the use of a lot of LSD over a relatively short period of time was part of the problem.

Even people without the gene for mental illness admit that recreational drugs can blur the line between reality and illusion. The experience of tripping on acid can be very powerful, at times terrifying, and is definitely not recommended for people who are mentally ill (or who have mental illness in their families). In fact, I would not recommend taking LSD to anyone.

Why did I take the LSD? I had gone off to school, and was on my own. My social status slipped a bit. I was no longer the big high school scholar, but on a campus with thousands of top notch academic types. Drugs were readily available and— I wanted to become a guru.

I wanted to become wise in the ways of the various levels of reality— to walk through the "doors of perception". I wanted to be able to explain to people the way life really is. To have a legitimate perspective that transcended the everyday.

I learned eventually that LSD only helps to unhinge the mind. If anything, it makes it harder to understand higher levels of thought, at least in any constructive way.

Furthermore, gurus are people who others appoint to that status due to their wisdom- not people who simply quaff many hits of liquid acid and go on trips.

Whether or not the acid caused my diagnosis, I certainly regret taking it, and am completely clean of such drugs at this point. And I am grateful to be clean.

## **Vladimir Putin**

It can be a strange thing to live in this world.

A trait of human experience is “intuition”— that feeling that one knows something, but can’t explain how. For those with a keen sense of intuition, they are often right about things. Sometimes they are correct enough that it becomes hard to explain.

Back in 2015 I developed a fixation with Vladimir Putin. I had a feeling that he was going to become a bigger player in the world political scene. This feeling had no factual basis, but I felt sure it was true.

I composed a series of prints and an album of music based on Putin, which I called “Sovereign” (TreeTrunk Records), back in 2015. I tried to capture the sense of mystery and fear I felt when I thought about Putin, and his possible rise in power.

Was it a coincidence that, roughly one year later, Putin became a center of global attention for his possible interference with a major U.S. election— and that this attention revolved (and revolves) around issues of “Sovereignty”? That some even suggested that this man has a hidden role in the U.S. government?

Easy to dismiss, perhaps, but I still recommend that people hold on to their intuitions, be they schizophrenic or no.

## **Muting Our Inner Voices**

It is my feeling that most people live a great deal in denial, muting their inner voices and refusing to listen to the realities of life. This being said, I understand. There are certain fundamental absurdities about being human.

For example, we all will die one day. When that happens, we can believe in transcendence, but we can not know that until this passage happens.



But, how can we live our lives, fulfilling our obligations, when we are focused on imminent demise?

I grew up in the 1980's at the end of the Cold War. It was a strange thing to be a kid, living in fear of the bomb. News about nuclear weapons showed up in a lot of our newspapers and news reports. It added a surreal, paranoid quality to life. As an eighties kid, you never knew if you would see adulthood, or old age.

Because we have to filter our thoughts, and push down certain things we know, some of our faculties become impaired, I believe, and it is my theory that our awareness and sensitivity returns occasionally in flashes of insight, revelation, or moments of peak emotion.

This is a bit like Habermas' theory of modern time, with its "Jetzeit" (or "empty") time, shot through with moments of Messianic time.

### **On The Dole**

When I learned that I would be able to survive on SSDI (Disability Benefits), I was, at first, relieved. I believed that I would never have to work again. I could just collect my check, and live a decent life that way.

Over a period of years, I got between \$600-\$800 or so a month, and some other benefits, including EBT (food stamps), rent assistance, Medicare and Medicaid. All of this was very helpful and I was lucky to receive it.

That being said, it was not a lot of money. I got used to living on soup, frozen burritos, beef patties, and breakfast bars. I smoked cheap cigarettes— GPCs. I rarely if ever bought clothes. If I was lucky, I would travel once a year (my yearly trip to Chicago). I survived, for sure— but I did not thrive.

I did not want to recognize it, but I suffered a lack of self esteem from living this way. My family had a strict work ethic, and they tolerated my lifestyle but never really approved of it. I did have lots of free time, but I struggled to find things to do with it. Without my music project, I am not sure what I would have done.

Things are better, now that I have decided to return to the world of work and to get married. There are no longer mice running around my kitchen, or substantial and constant leaks in my bathroom. The tiles in my shower are not flaking from the wall.

I do understand how it feels to live a life of poverty now. Given that I was raised with plenty of resources, this was an eye opening experience. It's something about me that not everyone might realize— I, too, waited every month for my EBT award to come through. I also collected "circuit breaker" benefits from my property taxes. I went for years wearing the same sneakers.

I lived on the dole with all of its advantages and disadvantages, and I chose to leave that life for a more independent one.

### **The Groovy Sound– Of Schizophrenia**

The music act I started, “mystified”, was a main preoccupation during my years of isolated suffering. The project was both a huge time suction, and perhaps, a saving grace. It gave me something to think about. I helped me to set and maintain goals. And even though I never was signed to Geffen or appeared on America’s Top 40, I did pretty well.

The netlabel scene was where mystified really got a response. Thanks to the mentorship of people like Christopher McDill (Webbed Hand Records), and others like him, the audio that I posted for free, usually to archive.org, began accumulating thousands upon thousands of listens and downloads.

To me, this was very exciting.

Reality, some would say, is often poetic. One of my biggest releases, “South City Spring” (2006 Treetrunk Records), was created using phonography. I recorded sounds in my shabby, low rent apartment, and used the sounds to create songs. These gritty sonic collages appealed to the masses.

Sometimes mystified sounded glib, smooth or abstract. But when my project was the most honest sound-wise and thematically, it did its best.

Listening to releases such as “South City Spring” and “Nocturne” (2006 Treetrunk Records) remind me of the ‘oughts– that ten-year period of living alone and working night and day to record and compose my own “schizophrenic sound”– the drip of a faucet, clink of metal from a pot or pan, the creak of a wooden floor, the slamming of a door.

### **Talking To Myself**

As I have mentioned, my main symptom is that I hear voices.

Usually, I am able to recognize that they are just thoughts in my head. On occasion, though, when I am alone, I start to vocalize words– to converse back and forth with myself.

This must seem strange to people, and when my wife discovers me doing this, coming home unawares, or hearing me in the shower, I feel ashamed. Encountering another person, a living breathing human, reminds me that the voices are like pretend ghosts, and that it is silly for me to acknowledge them.

Being in the company of others is one of the best remedies for the voices. The tendency for schizophrenics to isolate can be tragic, as that tends to be one of the worst things we can do. We lose focus, loosen our grip(s). We drift off, our symptoms begin to appear.

Sometimes when I am working, or moving about in public, I come across people who verbalize their voices freely, even when others are around. I feel bad for these people, though I know how that can happen.

I would conjecture that a keener awareness of the presence of others, and its significance, might help these people to become more still, to calm or silence the impulses that compel them to speak out loud to themselves.

### **Going Blank Again**

There is a symptom of schizophrenia called “a poverty of thought”. In other words, the patient simply has fewer thought processes going on than healthier people. Hence, they might seem disengaged, helpless, staring off into space, and so forth.

I felt that I was experiencing this for a period of time. I would attribute it to a general feeling of hopelessness. Why mull over the problems of the world when life is so absurd, and there are so many issues? Maybe it is best just to put them out of one’s mind.

I eventually felt that this was not the best of habits, so I tried to re-engage, finding various activities, creative and otherwise, to think about. Being married, and having 2 cats, also helps in this regard.

That being said, I would say that feeling guilty about empty or quiet states of mind is ultimately a bad idea. If a person feels at peace, that is really ok. If a person can’t connect at all, can’t function, then, obviously there is an issue. Otherwise, I wish I had never worried about the poverty of thought symptom.

Just today, I was feeling tired and out of ideas. I tried not to be concerned about it, and let it happen, and I am still fine.

### **Gestalt Theory**

Gestalt Theory suggests, as I understand it, that we humans tend to perceive to some degree what we expect to perceive. For example, if I am thinking about the color red, there is a good chance I will notice instances of the color red in the world around me, more than if I had not been thinking of it.

Schizophrenics are known for having false ideas, and I wonder how many of these are bound up with a form of Gestalt. If a patient already thinks the FBI is tapping their phone, and a funny noise comes through the signal during a call, that will only corroborate their theory.

Even if the sound had to do with a cell signal issue, some storm somewhere, because the patient has this theory, their perceptions will fit that theory. They will attribute what they see, hear and experience to their expectations.

I feel that Gestalt Theory has good and bad aspects. On the one hand, we really do shape the way we take in the world around us, we have some authorship. On the other hand, we can become trapped in the world as we interpret it, bound to own own interpretations, which may be limiting at times, or false.

Keeping an open mind, and engaging in dialogue with others, would be good tools to combat the negative sides of Gestalt-style thinking.

### **Martin Luther**

A figure who was a helper to me on my path was Martin Luther. I mention him not because he was critical of the Catholic Church. Rather I mention him because of his intense spiritual struggle, and the solution that he found.

History suggests that Martin as a young man was wracked with guilt—guilt that never went away. To remedy his spiritual situation, he tried a number of strategies. He flagellated himself. He fasted. He sang hymns for hours on end. He prayed. He confessed.

Finally, Luther arrived at a solution which had personal and spiritual ramifications. He conceived that Christ (and therefore God), was outside of himself. Christ abides, according to Luther, in Heaven, and Luther himself, in his own body and mind, can only gesture towards Christ— to praise him, pray to him, and so forth.

By differentiating himself from Christ, Luther was able to forgive himself, and to more effectively ask for God's grace.

As a schizophrenic, if I can distinguish my own mind and body from that of God, I can more readily understand the world around me, the people in it, and the universe at large. Incidentally, I am not the first mentally ill person to reach this conclusion, both about Luther, and as Luther did.

### **Sense Of Self**

A symptom of schizophrenia can be “a change in sense of self”. The patient views him or herself differently, after onset.

When I was initially diagnosed, the psychiatrist suggested that I thought I was Jesus Christ. I was sure I wasn't, but there must have been something strange about the way I was coming across.

One change was that I stopped seeing myself as a discrete and whole entity. I was no longer an “acting figure” in life. I became very submissive. I was interested in saying only the right things at the right times, as others willed them to be.

Trying to please everybody is a trait I still have— it's something I struggle with. I think, in a way, it shows that I care. But people pleasing can go too far— it can seem false, or make people feel uncomfortable.

I have seen this in other schizophrenics— they always have to be the friendliest people in the room, and they are often very deferential. Mentally ill people need to give themselves credit, no matter what life or diagnoses suggest.

We need to remember that we are people, too— that we have roles to play, and places in the bigger picture. We can make changes happen, in big and small ways.

In short, schizophrenics need to be— gulp— assertive.

## **MTV**

I wrote a bit earlier about the disjointed nature of modern life— the quick transitions from world to world, setting to setting.

Back in the 1980's, when I was a teenager, a new network emerged called MTV. This was a music channel that displayed music videos— often back to back for longer periods of time. Music videos were new to the world, and so was this kind of programming.

It spoke to the increasingly jarring nature of reality. Instead of slower-paced dramas or sitcoms, using the same characters over months or even years, programming was comprised of short snippets of media, perhaps shown again but appearing in different sequences.

The music was loud, there were lots of new sounds, and there was lots of rock and roll.

MTV lessened the strain on our attention spans— and it also spoke to the rapid pace and quick transitions that are so characteristic of modern life— and that can be so difficult for schizophrenics to navigate. I can testify that, with my diagnosis, it can take some time and energy to assimilate to new situations and environments. Life can feel more like MTV than a soap opera.

Later on, MTV changed their format, and explored the world of reality television. Again, this was innovative. It brought up a new idea— putting “normal” people in front of cameras for prolonged periods of time.

I would suggest that this was an abnormal phenomenon. Being on camera is different than being off. A person tends to be aware that they are being watched— they hold themselves differently, their speech is more contrived— they tend to be more on edge— even paranoid. Reality television is not really “reality” as we know it— it represents a new kind of reality— a televised reality.

In fact, my paranoia often feels a lot like I am on camera. I sense that others are somehow watching me, listening to me, tuning in. When I am alone, I am rather part of a community, a network. The sensation is pretty convincing. It reinforces the notion that MTV accurately depicted ways that modern people think— be they natural and healthy or no.

### **Musique Concrete**

As a schizophrenic, I might ask— what is reality? What am I really experiencing? Is it authentic? If I share my experiences with others, will they invalidate or deny them?

I would suggest that in today’s world, it is getting harder and harder to distinguish reality from artifice, more and more difficult to establish what is authentic. This can be disorienting for anyone— and is especially so for a schizophrenic.

One example of the blurred lines between things is the type of music called “musique concrete”. In traditional “abstract” music, actual instruments or voices are used. A musician, or musicians, sing or play instruments in tandem.

In the modern era, recording techniques have led to the emergence of Musique Concrete, in which recorded portions of sound are used as components. Often, musicians do not play the music at all— it is assembled, or mapped out in a software program— as segments of audio that are manipulated and arranged.

This can be somewhat disorienting. A non-instrumentalist can make a song that makes him or her sound like they play in an orchestra. A man can use a female voice, or effect his voice to make it sound effeminate— or, he can make it deeper, more masculine. Traditional musical sounds can appear alongside other sounds— field recordings, sound effects, and so forth. A musician can use “loops” (or repeating pieces of sound), to create the impression that the same phrase has been played again and again.

As a result, it is hard for me to say what I am hearing, and how it was created. I literally have no idea how much of a piece is “authentic”, and how much is “artificial”, or somehow canned.

I find that this kind of music is not altogether unpleasant, but it does raise questions.

Musique concrete represents one of many ways that modern reality works against traditional experiences, which, again, can be confusing for mentally ill people (and, frankly, for healthy people, too).

A person has to either be extremely sharp and prepared, or they need to let go, no longer worrying about the authenticity of what they see and hear— giving in to the levels of artifice present in today's world.

## **CG**

As technology improves, our ability to blur the lines between real and imaginary worlds progresses.

The use of “CG” (or “computer generated”) effects began some time ago. I remember watching the film “Tron” (1982) as a child. Though it looks primitive today, computers were used to create an entire universe in that film— interestingly, it was a universe inside a digital network.

George Lucas was a big proponent of CG effects, much to the chagrin of some of his fans. He was one of the first directors to add entire CG characters to a major film (such as in “Attack Of The Clones” [2002]).

Early CG characters did not fare so well, in terms of popular reaction. Viewers could easily tell that the figures were “not real”— that they were generated, and did not belong to the visual universe of the film.

Years later, and CG has become eerily advanced. Older characters, from actors or actresses who have aged or died, are being digitally resurrected into films. For example, the Rachel character from “Blade Runner” (1982) reappeared in “Blade Runner 2049” (2017)— and did not age a day in several decades, by all appearances.

It is a powerful ability, to use computers to create nearly any imagined image. It has already been an issue in news media that doctored, “photoshopped” images have been mistaken for actual ones.

As a schizophrenic, I have trained myself to doubt my senses. Perhaps we are approaching a time when we all will have to question what we experience.

If virtual reality catches on (and I believe that it will), I wonder how much of a grasp of the authentic, material world we will retain?

## **North Korea**

I have mentioned the uncomfortable, paranoid feeling of growing up in the 1980's, with the Cold War going on. A friend of mine pointed out that kids these days have similar fears.

Indeed, I am worried that we may be resurrecting the Cold War mentality. There has been escalation with Russia in the past years, and, of course— there's North Korea.

North Korea, led by the sinister Kim Jung-on, has been threatening to nuke the United States for many years. So effective is their media campaign, that nearly every week, a new threat emerges from this small but militarized nation.

It raises the question— should we be afraid? Should we live in fear of North Korea? If we believe what we see and hear, we should be afraid, indeed. A nuclear war could easily claim millions of lives— and by all reports, North Korea is increasingly able to start one.

Or— should we doubt our senses? Ignore the news? Life is hard enough without issues like this, after all. How are we going to get through the work week, if we have to worry about Kim Jung-on and his whole bizarre campaign?

I hope that my sane friends and not starting to feel a bit like I do. Paranoid schizophrenia is not an enjoyable condition.

## **In Public**

I wanted to add a quick post from work.

I am at my full-time job now. I feel nearly symptom free, and calm but alert. It has been nice to help quite a few people with their technological needs today.

I feel whole— almost sane.

The fears and blurred reality thoughts from my other posts seem especially paranoid from this perspective. These issues, and issues like them, have retreated to the background. That must be because my other posts were all written in my home environment. I usually write in solitude, now I am in the company of others, and have a role to play.

Having a job demands steady attention, and awareness. This is a great help to my schizophrenia. Work is not always easy, but I would definitely recommend it to many more mid- to high-functioning schizophrenics.

Take a chance, work alongside the sane. Help others. Heal yourselves.



It's a strange experience to see popular culture influencing politics. Some would say that Ronald Reagan pulled it off pretty well in the 1980's, though I am not sure the extent to which he was mainly a figurehead for his cabinet and others.

Arnold Schwarzenegger was known both for being "The Terminator" and the Governor of California.

Donald Trump, I always thought, was a successful businessman, and quite a character, with his own reality show. He was a campy figure— showing up on the wrestling network, making crass comments, and so forth. A symbol, both of American success and its corruption.

Trump's Presidency has further blurred the lines between reality and fiction for me. He tweets late at night, often impulsively. He hires and fires staff members like he's running a fast food restaurant. He puts forward a consistently campy persona. He still seems like a caricature— larger than life. He is still Donald Trump, mainly himself, and it's strange seeing him in the White House, instead of in a casino or a pool hall at a nice hotel.

I don't disavow everything he has done. He seems very adept at manipulating mass opinion, and in this era that is important. I wouldn't call him stupid. He does seem to have a certain horse sense. And some of his policies are helping the economy— at least for now.

But I have never in my life seen a President act and speak the way he does.

I guess you may be detecting a theme in my posts. My wife suggested that I should not associate so many topics with my mental illness. So what does 45 have to do with schizophrenia?

Just that the world itself feels less sane every week.

It really does.

### **Radical Doubt**

Looking back on many of my posts, and thinking about the world we live in today, a possible coping mechanism would be to institute a practice of "radical doubt".

By this, I don't mean a person should abandon all faith.

I think they should consider what they sense— and how to respond— before they believe in the authenticity of things. If they read an article in the paper, they need to ask who wrote it, and from what point of view. If they see an image, it is important that a person knows if they are getting a complete and accurate picture from it. Video footage, too— any media— can be doctored.

This comes from a paranoid schizophrenic, so you may choose to dismiss it. And that is fine, if you do, it's your decision. But I do know that I apply a rigor to my own thoughts and impressions, and definitely filter what I take in— and disregard a great deal of it.

In my own experience, there really isn't that much to know, of the things that a person can know at all.

To me, radical doubt makes a person mature. It differentiates a child from an adult. It is also what kids see in their parents that they fear or make fun of. Using radical doubt, though, isn't really being a "stick in the mud". A person can doubt many things and still believe in the important ones.

If there is any hope for this world, intelligent people need to question what they take in and establish their own realities. They then can react to the world's changing and confusing stimuli effectively.

### **The Voices Are Real. . . Or Are They?**

Did I tell you about how I tried to explain that the voices I hear are real?

One mistake I made, when I did this, was that I quoted the Bible. When a schizophrenic person quotes the Bible, a lot of times that is a bad sign. People start to shake their heads, even walk away in disbelief.

The Bible mentions certain spiritual gifts, such as the abilities to perform miracles and to prophecy (1 Corinthians 12:8–10). If a miracle is possible, what isn't? Additionally, many Biblical figures mention hearing the "voice of God". Did they hear an audible voice? Was it a thought? Or were they just schizophrenic?

After all, the voices can be very uncanny, and their resemblance to the sounds and thoughts of people I know are so close as to often be convincing. How could this chatter be something I made up? Is my mind that creative?

Humans sense more than we let on. I can tell when my wife is upset, and perceive others of her moods, fairly easily. And it's more than just body language, by the way— there are things about a person's presence that we experience without acknowledging. I would have to say they have to do with a spiritual reality.

If we can sense things as ephemeral as moods and emotions, who is to say that certain sensitives can't hear thoughts, or voices, of others?

When I made an attempt to explain my theory with my psychiatrist (a very helpful and friendly woman), she immediately increased my daily dosage of Risperdal.

## **Repetition**

My wife shared with me a trait she attributes to my illness— that, particularly in art, when I start a kind of task or trend, I do the same or a similar thing over and over again many times.

I often defended this as “practicing”— or, as Brian Eno suggested in his Oblique Strategies cards, “Repetition Is A Form Of Change”.

That is my view.

To my wife, a repetitive work ethic seems strenuous and extreme, and lacking in variety. She feels that it is my schizophrenia that prompts me to create in this fashion.

Perhaps an example of this would be my musical project, “Grid Resistor”. As Grid Resistor, I created over 26 hours of industrial drone textures in about 5 months. All sounds used in each piece were machine sounds that I had recorded. Each release was over 1 hour in length. The tracks had a naming convention, based on the date and point in the day that they were recorded. There was one release for each letter in the Greek Alphabet, and that letter was the release title.

A record label called the Grid Resistor project, “a window to an introspective and sterile world”.

Another example of this kind of creativity was when I used certain graphic processes to pixelate and otherwise manipulate photographs. I made hundreds of images, therefore, based on squares. This concerned my wife, who suggested that people had no need for so many works that were so similar.

All of this activity seemed perfectly normal to me. I am not sure how my friends on social media felt. The only phenomenon I noticed was that they tended to pay less attention if I did too much of the same thing.

What do you think? Do I exhibit good practice or is my creative process twisted and obsessive?

## **Can You Believe Me?**

It used to be said that “A man is only as good as his word”. This saying is probably not considered to be hip, as it is gender exclusive. Nonetheless, it does point to an accepted notion— that to be valued involves being trustworthy. If you say it, you must mean it, in order to be believed.

How can people believe the words of a schizophrenic?

This was a big problem for me, especially at first. Whether it was the illness itself, or just how I was coming across, people tended to doubt the things I said. I often became frustrated, particularly when I was being as honest and as genuine as possible.

I remember once I was in a room full of people. I looked outside the window and saw raindrops coming down. I said, "It's raining today."

Someone turned to me and replied, "No, it's not."

Of course, I can understand, in a way. If I am hearing voices, or have other symptoms, such as false beliefs, paranoia, and so forth— can I myself be trusted?

Interestingly, modern literature often involves the assumption that there is no completely trustworthy narrator. All characters in a book, including the one whose voice we channel, are human and therefore flawed. There is no modern Percival.

Yet, I would hope that people might consider that schizophrenics, too, want to be believed, problematic as that may seem. And, they may often be right about their notions, or at least they may present a viable and valuable point of view.

I am glad to report that, as I got older, more and more people placed their trust in me, be they family members or others. One, my wife, even calls me- "Her rock."

## **Loops**

In my various musical incarnations, including "mystified", I recorded using loops. Loops are pieces of media that are used repetitively. Often, they simply continue, without changing.

With loops, a small amount of material can easily become much longer.

Life has many loops. For example, there is the work week. Mondays are often very similar to one another, at least for me. Fridays have a particular character.

The sun has a certain motion across the sky, daily, and annually, too. We have morning, noon, and night. Also, there are Spring, Summer, Winter, and Fall, with all of their various attributes.

I know that every Fall, I remember the feeling of going back to school after summer break. I am not sure what triggers this— maybe it is the smell of decaying leaves (it is said that smell often prompts memories).

Thought processes, too, I feel tend to run in cycles. We may believe that we think in a linear fashion, but actually, we tend to run over the same or similar thought patterns many times a day.

What causes a sense of disorientation, whether listening to a song with lots of loops in it, or thinking about other loops, be they in our minds or in the world around us, is when our perspective shifts.

Recently, when I have my “back to school” thoughts, they come with the recognition that I do not actually have to buy school supplies, or plan to study again. That is all from the distant past. I both anticipate school, and realize that it will not actually be part of my life.

Then, the source of repetition provides a familiar input, but where we stand in relation to it shifts. As Brian Eno suggests, in his Oblique Strategy deck, “Repetition Is A Form Of Change”.

This relationship between the changeable self and a static reality can feel strange— “trippy”, as some might say. Mentally ill people may find it to be particularly unsettling.

Whether healthy or schizophrenic, modern life’s tendency to repeat itself, to run in cycles, is very much a part of human experience.

## **The Body**

I have been thinking a lot about how thoughts have a physical nature to them. Of course, we like to consider ourselves to be spiritual (or, nowadays, mostly cerebral), but in fact, the way we feel and even think has a lot to do with our bodies.

When I am physically calm and comfortable, I can think more clearly.

My wife and I always see certain things differently— I think this has to do with physical differences tied to our gender(s).

The medicine I take inhibits Serotonin in my brain. Serotonin is associated with experiencing pleasure. So, what, in part, keeps my lucid has to do with my body feeling less pleasure.

I wonder if, instead of associating most of what we feel and think with a sort of identity, we were to admit that a lot has to do with our bodies, and how we treat them, and how they are treated.

By no means does this mean that a person would only experience pleasure, at all times, forever.

Perhaps, though, they could admit that what pain there is is sometimes needed to produce clarity— to survive in a complex and changing environment.

I have had a bad history of denying my physical nature and needs and I feel sad for people who still can’t see this about themselves— who rock back and forth uncomfortably, refusing to associate sadness and anger with personal, corporal pain.

## **A Strong Intuition**

A powerful intuition seized me today, that might help to resolve some of the reality versus illusion posts I have made, and some of the issues in them.

It was that there must be a firm duality, a difference, nearly a Cartesian one, between the world of sensory experience and some kind of emotional or spiritual world.

For example, if I am home with my wife, I can watch a program on my laptop—presumably for as long as I like. That does not eliminate my awareness of, or the reality of, my wife's presence. It does not cancel out the significance of our relationship.

Humanity may indeed be heading down a proverbial rabbit hole. With virtual reality imminent, I think it is essential to grab hold of something real. That is a kind of interior reality, where relationships, love and faith exist.

We have to hold tight to the yarn that we let loose as we walked into the labyrinth.

I would go so far as to suggest that, insofar as a person is able to grasp this duality, this division between the sensory and the internal or spiritual, that dictates the individual's ability to lead a sane and worthwhile existence.

Note that I am not trying to moralize away the world of the senses-- only to suggest, to remind, perhaps myself if no one else, that sensory experiences will forever be apart from the worlds of the heart and soul.

## **Show Me**

Do me a favor—distract me. Not from my purpose, but from myself.

You can put an end to my inner conversations by offering me real things to talk about, and actual people to talk with.

My meandering creativity, which so often slowly moves away from the world of work and commerce, can be reoriented, made to focus, when it is given a purpose, when its activity is requested or needed.

If I feel I have a reason to try, and an avenue in which to do it, I can achieve great things.

I can't help but to wonder how true this is for so many mentally ill or other disabled people, as well as the elderly and others pushed to the periphery of our culture.

How often is it the case that at issue is not a lack of ability, but a lack of purpose. Not less talent than is required, but the need for a means to express it.

Point me to a road to a better life, and I might just take it. I doubt that I am alone in this.

### **“Normal”**

I have schizophrenia, yes.

But to me, I am normal.

If I think about it, that’s true. That’s because I recognize my own thoughts, experiences, and means of processing things. My life is predictable enough, steady enough, that I know what to expect. Plus, I am now 46– not a kid anymore.

That’s what’s so strange when one is mentally ill, and light is shed on one’s thoughts– as being abnormal. Because, to the patient, of course, they are quite normal– habitual, even.

I have been going back and creating some mini-documentaries about my old musical projects. One of them, “AutoCad”, had a lot to do with numbers– fractals, equations, and so forth.

I spent some time jotting down my memories about that act, and read them out loud into a recording device.

Hearing my thoughts later, I was like, “Man, people would think that is weird.”

AutoCad involved some strange ideas, and it may be that the world would not readily accept them.

So, for sure, when speaking with others, especially the mentally ill, it might be best to remember that to them, their thoughts and reactions might not seem very shocking– no matter how unusual they might seem to you.

### **Frozen Burritos**

Alas, as an isolated schizophrenic, not only was I poor, but often lacking in judgement.

One way this manifested itself was through my diet.

At one point, through a combination of Olanzapine and unhealthy eating, I weighed over 270 pounds.

I had only one pair of pants that fit, and could not stand my appearance. Nor was it healthy.

I remember frozen burritos– bleach-white tortillas containing a gritty bean and beef paste.

I remember Holton meats. These were beef patties that came in packs of 20. I would grill so many of them that the smoke and soot changed the color of my kitchen. When I read the ingredients of Holton patties, I noticed they contained, among other things, beef hearts.

I remember Totinos pizzas. They look like microwave pizzas, and used to cost about a buck apiece. But you still have to fire up your oven to cook them.

I remember Ramen— 3 packages for a dollar. Boil the noodles up, and fill your empty stomach.

I remember Pop tarts.

I remember chewy granola bars.

I remember extremely cheap whiskey. I stopped drinking that because I did not ever know how much I was taking in.

I remember two-fer beers— you know the kind— tall boys. These were for when you are poor enough that you can only think of today— really, only this hour of the day.

I am not exactly Julia Childs nowadays, but things have gotten better. When I backslide, my wife voices her concern, and I redouble my efforts to eat a more healthy diet.

If anyone wonders why schizophrenics tend to live shorter lives— well, it's not mental or emotional. It's the crap they eat, drink and smoke.

## **Aliens**

I am going to write a post about Aliens and U.F.O.s, but I don't think this is the post you are expecting to read from a schizophrenic.

Not long ago, it was revealed that the legendary military site, "Area 51", which was said to have been involved in all kinds of top secret U.F.O. activity, was actually used for many years as a testing stage for high-performance military aircraft. The strange lights and other phenomena people reported were actually planes built by the U.S. for military purposes.

I pretty much don't believe in U.F.O. sightings, and I think the footage we see is of other things, or it's been doctored.

As for aliens, I have done some incidental research, and I believe that Americans' fascination with aliens in the 1950's had to do with the Soviet Union. I am not sure if military propagandists started it, but fear of aliens was just another form of "Red Fear". The aliens were a symbol of the unknown invader— powerful and with high technology. The aliens represented our terror of a Russian invasion. I think that was all it was, plain in simple.

Yes, the truth is "out there"— but not that far.



## **Very Strange Ideas**

Being a schizophrenic, I am sensitive to the fact that some of my ideas might be taken as false—that I my thoughts might be held into question. I don't like thinking that, but I do admit that it is probably a good idea— not only for me, but for people in general— that thoughts are considered before they are accepted as truth.

I have heard some interesting notions myself, and am often not sure if the people who voiced them were mentally ill or not.

My wife and I shared a cab after a trip, and the cab driver insisted that Hillary Clinton was one of many “reptile” people. He felt that the reptile people came from somewhere other than the Earth, and that they intended to take over the planet.

I hear lots of political and financial ideas. One man told me at great length that a network of banks controls the world, not governments. He listed several tie-ins that suggested that major events were related to the monetary decisions of banking institutions, though most of us did not know this.

Another man I came across, who later admitted that he had been in a motorcycle accident, told a coworker at that there was some kind of tax conspiracy here in our hometown and it had to do with the courts. People were being bilked out of millions of dollars.

When people have theories like these, and share them— I notice some commonalities. One is that they tend to go on for some time about them. The ideas were obviously formed in solitude, where they grew quite complex and elaborate. Another is that they always have lots of evidence— loads of it.

It is as if, at the end of hearing these monologues, no matter who we are, we have no choice but to agree that the theories are indeed fact.

Either there are a lot of sane people out there with false ideas or there are lots of schizophrenics— more than one might expect.

## **Down The Rabbit Hole**

I have been trying to focus more on establishing dividing lines between reality and illusion in more recent posts. This especially pertains to the post I made about creating a duality between sensory and emotional realities.

Today, something strange happened, and I had a little bit of a freak out.

My wife's Google Photo Assistant assembled a video using only pictures of our cat Tobi from the last 2 years. Some pictures were close-ups, others from farther away. Some had other people in them. But all included Tobi. There was even a little musical piece accompanying the video, using synthetic bells and guitar sounds.

Apparently, the Google network was able to recognize our cat's face, and put together this media on its own, without us asking.

In other instances, I can explain away such things— ie, I might know how a system could do certain things.

But I find this hard to explain.

Even though I am less paranoid than some of my sane friends about privacy and similar issues in this digital age, I reached a point where I had to nod and agree that lines are being crossed.

It's interesting to consider the kinds of things that are possible now at a computer network can recognize faces and generate its own media. I will allow you to consider these things yourself.

I am tired now— maybe it's too much for a paranoid schizophrenic to take in.

### **Human Nature And Dignity**

Having schizophrenia is, I admit, a disadvantage. It can present a challenge, or series of them. Part of the problem is that I actually may not be as able in certain situations as others. Another part is the stigma that is attached to the illness.

Disability is actually a very common condition in our modern world. There are many types of disabilities— some mental, some physical. All present difficulties to those who suffer. I am sure that most disabled people would like to transcend their condition(s), and to be regarded as valued people.

To be clear, in recent times, most of the people in my immediate circle of family, friends and coworkers have been very supportive of my condition. They have been more accepting and encouraging than I would have expected.

I am happy about this, and I do indeed hope that other disabled people get treated with respect and decency.

All people, after all, deserve dignity. For they are born, indeed they suffer, and indeed they die. No one escapes this fate. The insane suffer and die alongside the sane. I make a plea then that this be remembered, and that we treat one another well, regardless of other factors.

## **Fears**

As a schizophrenic living alone on various forms of government assistance, you might think I had little to worry about. The checks came in every month, and everything was taken care of.

However, there were very real concerns.

One involved government shutdown. Whenever the Feds would start talking about the debt ceiling, and the government would shut down, there were suggestions that Social Security checks would not go out. And when that monthly check is basically all you get (and you are living month to month), that creates a real issue.

A second big fear was of assessments. Every few years, Social Security would request that the awards recipient undergo a new series of considerations, to ascertain whether or not they could continue receiving SSDI money. In other words, were they “sick enough” or “the right kind of sick” to get the monthly checks.

I would count the months until these assessments, worrying that I would be found to be too healthy to get help, and wondering if I was able, that being the case, to return to work.

Now that I am employed and earn my own income, I am much more confident about the money I receive. I am no longer at the financial edge, looking into oblivion. I even have a modest savings.

It is a great relief.